

# UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

## Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

**Presenter: Jimmie Briggs, Co-founder and Executive Director Emeritus, Man Up Campaign**

### Transcript

[TEXT: Young African Leaders Initiative Online Training Series]

[TEXT: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls with Jimmie Briggs]

Hello. My name is Jimmie Briggs and this is *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls*.

In this lesson, we will discuss the brutal facts surrounding violence against women and girls and the devastating consequences. We will talk about the responsibility that men have in preventing gender-based violence, and we will learn about approaches to addressing it.

Since 2009, I've been part of a global campaign to activate youth to stop the violence against women and girls through a global initiative I created called "Man Up Campaign."

Violence against women and girls, irrespective of what community, country or continent where one lives, is one of the most pervasive challenges facing humankind. The consequences across society, from the individual to nation-states and regions, demonstrate the range and severity of the crisis:

One out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.

Girls and young women who are victims of sexual violence can be limited in their educational opportunities and achievements, affecting their capacity to earn a viable income.

When women and girls are oppressed by violence and intimidation, businesses and government agencies are impacted — from employee absences, security costs, prosecution of alleged perpetrators, and increased poverty from a shrunken workforce of female citizens unable to work at their full capacity.

Further, women who have experienced violence are at a higher risk of HIV infection. A critical survey several years ago among South African women showed that those who were beaten by their partners were 48% more likely to be infected with HIV than those who were not beaten.

As advocates and leaders within your respective organizations and communities, you have an opportunity, a responsibility, to mitigate and halt this pernicious phenomenon.

The most important action is the one you must do first: educate yourself about the violence against women and girls. It is not uncommon that people's general awareness is minimal. In large part, that is a consequence of it not being discussed openly. It can include physical violence, emotional abuse, sexual interaction without consent, or rape, economic control, political disenfranchisement, denial of the right to education, as well as denial of independent movement or action. Simply, it is any form of violence against women and girls because they are women and girls, which specifically means it's a form of gender violence.

Often, violence against women and girls is fostered by negative constructs of masculinity and manhood, which lead men to believe they must hold certain qualities and exhibit behavior which is typically harmful



to others, and sometimes themselves. For example, physical strength and sexual prowess can be used as indicators of whether or not someone is a “real man,” as well as economic viability — being able to provide for oneself and family — and, having recognized authority or power beyond oneself.

For men of all ages, it is critical to facilitate or initiate dialogue amongst themselves about violence against women and girls, and broader issues about gender and manhood. Most men are not consciously perpetrating acts of violence against women and girls. The main problem is that most men who are not abusive — physically nor verbally — remain silent and do not hold other men accountable, much less discourage their language and behavior. Achieving gender equality and the prevention of violence against women and girls is simply an impossible goal without changing the mind-set and actions of boys and young men toward their female counterparts. It also requires redefining and embracing representations of manhood that run counter to traditional examples. For too long the absence of men and boys in the larger discussions women constantly have has been an impediment to lasting progress.

Women and girls, too, must be able to share their truths as survivors of targeted violence inflicted upon them because of their gender. Real fears about social stigma and isolation can only be overcome through the broad recognition that violence against women and girls is tragically normalized. By not giving the survivors of gender-based violence emotional affirmation and nonjudgmental support, we allow their offenders to operate freely and with impunity.

Having those nascent conversations about violence against women and girls must be done in safe spaces, preferably where people congregate and naturally feel most comfortable. When working with young people, this demands that advocates and educators go where they are, such as athletic fields, schools, churches, community centers, and play areas, for example. Young people generally have few opportunities to address violence against women and girls. Engaging them with the language and tools to which they’re most drawn increases the chances of successful attitude and behavior change, as well as increased awareness leading to possible advocacy.

A key component for responding to violence against women and girls is messaging. From examples of campaigns done by the World Bank and nongovernmental agencies to galvanize advocacy on this issue, it is important that messaging be not only appropriate to an audience in terms of education, age, and language, but also relevant. Whether discussing violence against women and girls in a small village, or in a national setting, the dialogue must speak to the greatest challenge facing the audience. In other words, you as leaders must know what forms of violence pose the greatest threat. Trafficking may not be relevant in one situation, but the threat of so-called “honor” crimes might. The messaging and “call to action” within a community, organization or among peers must resonate and be achievable to have lasting effect. If people understand that something impacts them and/or someone in their lives, it feels personal and more easily relatable.

Success in addressing violence against women and girls must be seen as a long-term, intergenerational endeavor. It’s about transforming cultures and societies which hold beliefs and systems harmful to women and girls, as well as other vulnerable populations. It demands of you as leaders maintenance of focus, work in community with other like-minded individuals to identify viable responses, and hope.

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